



A ROGUE OPERATION

HE HAD PROBABLY done this a dozen times before. Modern digital technology had made clandestine communications with overseas agents seem routine. Back in the Cold War, contacting a secret agent in Moscow or Beijing was a dangerous, labor-intensive process that could take days or even weeks to arrange. But by 2004, it was possible to send high-speed, encrypted messages directly and instantaneously from CIA headquarters to agents in the field who were equipped with small, covert personal communications devices. So the officer at CIA headquarters assigned to handle communications with the agency's spies in Iran probably didn't think twice when she began her latest download. With a few simple commands, she sent a secret data flow to one of the Iranian agents in the CIA's spy network. Just like she had done so many times before.

But this time, the ease and speed of the technology betrayed her. The CIA officer had made a disastrous mistake. She had sent information to one Iranian agent meant for an entire spy network; the data could be used to identify virtually every spy the CIA had inside Iran.

Mistake piled on mistake. As the CIA later learned, the Iranian who received the download was actually a double agent. The agent quickly turned the data over to Iranian security officials, and it enabled them to "roll up" the CIA's agent network throughout Iran.

ans might have about how he came to acquire the blueprints, which were not easy to access or remove from Arzamas.

The Russian was also told not to try to hide the fact that he now lived in the United States. His story should be as close to the truth as possible. Just because he was living in America didn't mean he was working for the CIA.

But now that he was in Vienna, he was playing the role of bumbling scientist too well, unable to find the Iranian mission, uncertain even where to get off the train. "I spent a lot of time to ask people as I could [language problem] and they told me that no streets with this name are around," the Russian later explained to the CIA, in his imperfect English.

Maybe deep down, he didn't want to get off the tram, and didn't want to find the right office. He had to find time to think.

He could not stop thinking about his trip to San Francisco, when he had studied the blueprints the CIA had given him. Within minutes of being handed the designs, he had identified a flaw. "This isn't right," he told the CIA officers gathered around the hotel room. "There is something wrong." His comments prompted stony looks, but no straight answers from the CIA men in the room. No one in the San Francisco meeting seemed surprised by the Russian's assertion that the blueprints didn't look quite right, but no one wanted to enlighten him further on the matter, either.

In fact, the CIA case officer who was the Russian's personal handler had been stunned by the Russian's statement. During a break, he took the senior CIA officer aside. "He wasn't supposed to know that," the CIA case officer told his superior. "He wasn't supposed to find a flaw."

"Don't worry," the senior CIA officer calmly replied. "It doesn't matter."

The CIA case officer couldn't believe the senior CIA officer's an-